

Title: Trial of C. Wolkoff [1]

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The night proved to be magical. Caina bedecked itself for a host of revelers to attend the inaugural ball of the Mayor. Newly fallen snow covered most, if not all, of the blood-drenched lands of Caina, giving it, for this one night, an ethereal glow of excruciating beauty and wildness. The evening's events began atop the Tower of Skulls with a brief speech by the Mayor. As he dismissed the celebrants to their sport, a hush fell over those nearest the stairs. From below, darkness preceded the Master of Golgotha as he slowly climbed to the roof. Mainlanders stood agape at a rare vision of Azalin, the lich lord – one that did not include their deaths or madness. With a voice that coldly sliced through the chatter of his unwanted guests, Azalin bid them to silence and stood before the Mayor.

“We wish to make a gift to the Mayor of Caina, for his exceptional work in governing our lands,” Azalin began as mainlanders edged further away from his menacing gaze. He held a key aloft. “This is the Key to Caina which we present to the Mayor, and this...”

The macabre grin
perpetually frozen to the
lich's face grew in
grotesque proportions. The
violet lights that formed
his eyes, transfixing in
their horrific beauty,
stared at the Mayor as
he spoke. In his right
hand, he held a large
golden ring, encrusted
with sigils and gems.

"This is the Ring of
Caina. For your service,
we give you this ring."

Treadeau stepped before
Azalin and gratefully
accepted the key and the
ring. The latter he slipped
over his finger. The
audience breathed a
collective sigh, as the
Mayor remained apparently
healthy before them.

"Now we shall allow you
to return to your
revelry," Azalin breathed
towards the audience. His
voice held a note of
loathing as his gaze
rested on several known
Lightbearers and sages.
The crowd again held
their breath as he glided
noiselessly down the steps
of Caina and in to his
chambers. On the roof of
the tower, the night
seemed slightly less dark
and foreboding. Stars
peeped out from the
clouds and the twin
moons bathed the
snow-covered landscape in
an unholy glow.

Kelila Kali first
penetrated the vacuum
caused by the lich's
departure. She turned to
Jared, Paladin of the
Lost Order of Akalabeth
and resumed their
conversation.

“As I was saying earlier, our fair city is positively beset these days with those foul vermin. You cannot step but three feet without coming face to face with a wolf. I do not know from where they come, but they must be exterminated.”

The Magistrate, congratulating the Mayor, froze in mid sentence and stared at the Vice-Mayor.

“In fact, I offer a reward of gold for each wolf pelt brought before me.”

From all directions, simultaneous shrieks of indignation were heard. Velika, ashen faced, glared at Kelila. Callisto Gabriel, Zappa and Kryste, their trained wolves ever at their feet, snarled in hatred of the witch.
“You cannot do this thing, crone!”
“These wolves are more than our pets!”
“They have more of a right to this land than you, hag!”
“Threaten my family like this, and you find yourself before my court and dead, no?”
“I’ll kill you myself...”

A clamour of threats, indignant retorts and outraged exhortations flurried around Kelila who smiled at the cacophony. Among the spectators, an old Vistana seer watched Velika closely. Silently, Cerenje Wolkoff absorbed the proceedings, staring quietly at her mistress’ wrath and nodding to herself. The celebrants began drifting out of

Golgotha and towards the Casino where the promises of wine and ale beckoned. Velika followed Kelila and confronted her before the wasted remains of the Hospice.

“Vice-Mayor, you cannot do this thing. You cannot threaten the wolves this way, no?”

“I can, and I do. These wolves are a nuisance, and they have increased in number of late. If they were not so useful in certain of my experiments, I would say they should all just be slaughtered. As it is, I have need of their pelts. My offer of gold stands. For every pelt skinned off the dead corpse of a wolf in Caina, I will give a reward of several crowns.”

Horror and disgust etched Velika’s face with every word uttered by Kelila.

“You will find yourself in my court, if you do this. I will try you, condemn you and kill you myself.”

Alucard, Emissary of Caina walked towards the arguing women in time to hear the last of Velika’s claims. He frowned as both women turned on their heels and stalked in opposite directions. Following Velika, Alucard considered the possible outcomes of this outburst. None of them were good. Catching the Magistrate near the varda of the Vistani, Alucard bade her stop.

“M’lady Magistrate,

“what are you doing?”

“What is it that you want, Emissary?”

“You cannot threaten the Vice-Mayor this way, Velika. It would not be healthy for your career,” Alucard suggested, frowning over the Magistrate’s rash actions.

“She threatens my family, Alucard. I will not tolerate this.”

As he was considering her words, Callisto Gabriel stormed through the clearing fuming. Zappa followed close at her heels, requesting that she stop.

“Whatever is the matter?” He began.

“That.... that.... that hag killed my wolf!” The Sage of Humility sputtered in her utter outrage. As a tamer of beasts, Callisto had a special affinity for her pets, knowledge of their intelligence and loyalty far beyond that of most humans. Dark clouds formed on Zappa’s brow. He also held a great love and respect for the animals he tamed.

“She did what?!”

“She killed him! I was riding with my wolves near the shore, and that witch came out and killed him!”

“Where is she?! I will kill her myself!” Zappa thundered as he tore from the clearing towards the shore, Callisto following closely on his

heels. Velika and Alucard stopped their conversation and watched the couple race for the ocean. They returned shortly, frustration marking their faces as Kelila had alluded their grasp. Zappa continued muttering vile threats and premonition's of the witch's death while Callisto consoled herself with her remaining wolf.

In subdued tones, Alucard claimed, "You must be more careful, Magistrate, you cannot be caught committing such a crime."

Velika smiled instantly.

"Of course I would not be caught, Alucard."

"Then do what you must"

He turned and walked purposefully towards the Well of Souls to watch the dragon fighting. Velika smiled at his back and retreated into the Casino, seeking some Bloodwine to cool her temper. Just as she discovered that none existed among the merchants, an announcement was made that Nexus Graveheart would soon fight a dragon in single combat. Velika rose with many of the other patrons and walked through the snow to the Well of Souls. A dragon fight was never something to miss, and Nexus was renowned for his prowess in battle.

Spectators filled the Well of Souls, waiting for the commander of the militia to begin the battle. Chained to the ice was a

large red dragon; his claws had scarred the floor of the Well in his attempts to break free and eat any of the people standing too close. Sal Veya had already fled from the Wells as he had wandered too close to the beast in an attempt to inspect him. Wagers crossed hands as many declared Nexus a fool to attempt such a battle. Many more, knowing his skill, smiled in smug satisfaction that they would soon relieve the Lightbearers of some hard-earned gold. Nexus nodded slowly to Geist to release the dragon and the enormous beast lunged towards his armoured opponent. From the corner of her eye, Velika saw someone in the crowd trace a sigil in the air and a faint, almost imperceptible glow covered Nexus. Suddenly, his movements slowed and the dragon, sensing an advantage, mercilessly buffeted him with his wings and claws. Another motion from the crowd, and Nexus stopped entirely, transfixed to the ice as if made of stone. The dragon sank his teeth through his midsection and tore the commander apart.

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